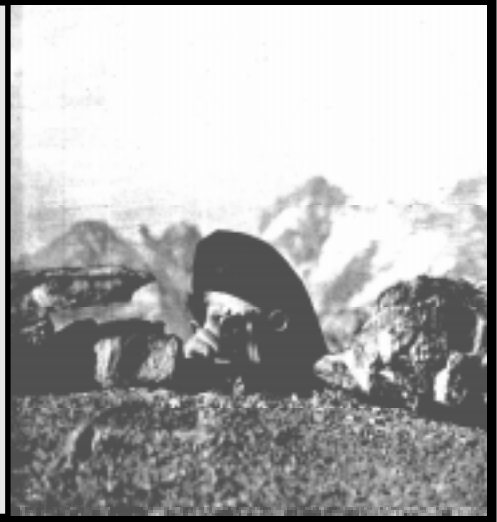


VIEW FROM THE TRENCHES

Number 5

Nov 95



PREP FIRE

Hello and welcome to issue five of *View from The Trenches*.

This issue concentrates on playing non-FTF ASL, which is ironic when you consider it is coming out in time for Intensive Fire '95, the first ASL convention in the UK! It also sees the publication of the first two *View From The Trenches* scenarios. The first has been submitted by a reader, the second has been taken from the InterNet. I've no doubt many of you would be interested in seeing the InterNet scenarios, and in future I hope to have at least one in every issue. I'll still like to see your own scenarios as well though.

Talking of the InterNet, would anyone be interested in seeing articles based on the debates that can be found on the ASL Mailing List, such as a recent debate on the effects of a 2 CC DR. Linked with this, does anyone have any queries they would like me to post so that I can gather the resulting debate into articles in future issues?

Some of the newer readers among you have asked me for copies of issues 1 and 2. I can't help any of you really as far as back issues go. I tend to print enough for everyone on the mailing list and a few spares to cover newcomers. If I get enough requests though, I might consider reprinting the articles from the first couple of issues, or perhaps gather them into a special edition.

On the personal side, does anyone have issues 103 and 111 of *On All Fronts*, as I would love to see their Central Railway Station extension for *Red Barricades*. Would anyone like to lend me these issues, or perhaps bring them to Intensive Fire '95 so I might have a look at them?

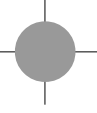
Talking of which, the UK's first ASL convention is nearly here (and will be gone by the time some of you get this issue). With over 55 players attending, some of them from Europe and even America, it should be an exciting weekend. I look forward to meeting many of you there, so I can put faces to the names of some of you. For those unable to attend, a full report will be in the next issue of *View From The Trenches*.

Until next time, roll low and prosper.

Pete Phillipps

INSIDE

PREP FIRE	1
MAIL SHOTS	2
ELECTRONIC WARFARE	3
CRITICAL HIT!	4
IS THERE ASL LIFE	
AFTER AVALON HILL?	4
NON-COM - MUNICATION	5



MAIL SHOTS

Bill Durrant

Play By Mail (PBM) has been a big part of wargaming for years now, with Diplomacy being one of the most common postal games. Here though, is a look at something many might find difficult to imagine - playing ASL by mail.

Since the advent of ASL we have been promised an official PBM method (it was even given the designation Chapter L in the original Table of Contents) but so far nothing has materialised. It even got a mention in the 93b annual's *Forward Observer* as following *March To Oblivion* and *Doomed Battalions*. All pigs refuelled and ready for take off!! Necessity being the mother of invention, over the years a PBM system has been designed and refined. I'm here to tell you it can and do work. It can even become quite enjoyable.

PBM ASL is not without its problems but with a little application these are not insurmountable. Sent with the defenders set up are sealed paper folds containing HIP and Concealed units. Concealed units are represented by the identity of the '?' counter with the number of counters underneath shown afterwards in brackets. When called for these are opened. The first fold contains the identity of just one unit for detection purposes (A12.15). Obviously HIP can only be revealed during the owner's mailing which causes problems if movement starts into a HIP. This rarely happens as one rarely resists the temptation of point blank fire.

Each event is given a number as in a *Series Replay*, and each player mails off the pre-designated phases. These go as follows: Attacker - RPh, PFPh, MPh; Defender - DFPh; Attacker - AFPh, RtPh, APh, CCPh, RPh; Defender - RtPh, CCPh, RPh, PFPh, MPh; etc, etc. In this way a game turn takes six mailings (other than for initial set up) and thus an eight turn scenario can normally be completed in about a year. As such, given enough space I would say roughly four games going at once will keep you more than occupied.

All die rolls are conducted by the mailing player, including those for an opponent. This obviously calls for total trust and honesty. A system has been devised to use

pre-designated die rolls but is too complicated to explain here. If you can't hack your opponent rolling three threes on Random Selection for a 1 KIA (twice in a row - thanks Paul!) then maybe PBM ASL is not for you.

The main problem comes with the MPh as all movement has to be pre-determined. Movement is recorded in such a way that each hex is revealed without seeing the next (again you must be honest and make a decision as to First Fire before revealing the next hex - it may be a stop). The idealist would say this is more realistic. The realist would say this is likely to upset play balance. Personally I'm sitting on the fence. Bounding First Fire is dealt with as it occurs on the movement record. Very occasionally it may be necessary to send a search mailing, IE send the moves of only half your units to try and reveal HIP and/or concealment.

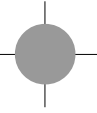
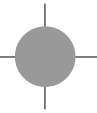
A few other problems can arise, such as multiple Sniper targets (A14.2 - preferences can be given at the start of a scenario, IE Leader, hero, crew, squad, HS) and voluntary abandonment of a vehicle by its crew immediately after immobilisation. I'm sure that are others, but, after, they are very rare.

Close Combat can pose another problem. The player mailing CC pre-designates his targets and rolls the CC DR. These results are sealed and the opposing player conducts all his CC DR before revealing them. This works equally well regardless of ambush.

It is normally a good idea to confirm the position of all counters at least once per player turn. This is ideally done after the DFPh and completed by the mailing player. A PC with spreadsheet software can save an immense amount of time during a larger scenario. I am fortunate to have this, and the space to leave my scenarios set up which I definitely recommend.

In general, PBM ASL does work and has its advantages as well. The temptation in a FTF game is to look for a rule for about five minutes and then let common sense prevail. PBM gives you time to find the right answer. Okay, there's a fair amount of book-keeping but it's sometime just as interesting to read your own series replay, rather than those of

Continued on page 6



ELECTRONIC WARFARE

Neil Stevens

Electronic mail has begun to replace postal mail in business in recent times, and now more and more gamers are beginning to do the same for PBM, resulting in Play By Electronic Mail (PBEM). Although the two are very similar, there are some differences, as the following article shows.

'What ever has the Information Super Highway got to offer me?'

To be absolutely honest I wasn't really sure but, being a bit of a lover of technology, I decided to find out and, as a wargamer and ASLer, I have never looked back.

First of all I wanted to get on-line. There are a number of ways of achieving this and by far the best way is to do it as a student through your college or university. If you achieve this you will not have to pay for telephone connect charges. If you are too old to be a student (Heck! I'm a student and I'm 30 years old!) then you have to find yourself a modem for your computer and a provider. A provider is a firm that will; provide you with suitable software, give you a couple of access telephone numbers to dial in and ask for an address to send the monthly bill to. I chose CompuServe which many of you will have heard of. They are not the cheapest provider around but the software they provide is 'Windows' based and accessing the 'Net' is intuitive.

On CompuServe I quickly found the Forum where the gamers hang out. Located in the PBMGAMES Forum there is a section for Board Wargames and there there is a lively group of ASL enthusiasts from all over the World. From the Forum Library a number of ASL related articles and features can be downloaded to your hard disk for reading at your own leisure. There will also be a number of Play By Electronic Mail (PBEM) games underway and they are all played openly. This allows anybody to read the game turns and follow the run of play. Well, one has to keep an eye on the opposition! Any questions about rules or any aspect of the game will usually be answered within 12 hours of being posted on the Forum. And remember a lot of

the ASLers are in the States with access to the very latest information about the state of our hobby.

One of the CompuServe members actually runs an ASL Ladder. This is open to anybody and involves you challenging somebody else to a game of ASL on a mutually agreed scenario. The game is then played over the course of a few weeks until a winner/loser is found and the results are then reflected on the Ladder - or 'The Greasy Pole' as it is affectionately termed. Do not be afraid of feeling out of your depth on the Ladder it is for everybody, beginners or experts, and I can promise one thing - you will learn a great deal more about the game. If you believe that ASL cannot be adapted for PBEM then try it. It is VERY successful and actually is an ideal way to play. You can play your game turns at your own speed and take as much time as you like to look up rules and sort things out for yourself. The gamers on CompuServe are also a friendly bunch and, should you make an error, it will be resolved in an amicable fashion; after all none of us are perfect.

As well as the PBEMGAMES Forum CompuServe also provides access to the Internet. To log on to the Internet ASL Mailing List you send a simple coded message to the List Server (the computer in the States that runs the List). Then you will receive, in your electronic mail box, every message or conversation that is held on the Internet about ASL. This is an extremely rich vein of thoughts, views and opinions of ASL. With over 300 people on the List anything that there is to know about the hobby is there. If you wish to ask a question or make a comment you send your message to the List Server and it automatically re-transmits it to everybody on the Mailing List. There is humour, comments, reviews, questions, scenario after action reports, Convention news and all sorts of things available. What's more it means that your EMail pigeon hole always has something in it!

Anybody who wishes to join the ASL Internet Mailing List and has access to a computer with a modem should EMail **listserv@psuvm.psu.edu** with the message

Continued on page 6

CRITICAL HIT!

By Steve Trease

Critical Hit! is a biannual American ASL fanzine billing itself as 'The Independent Journal of the ASL Hobby'. It is produced to a high standard as a black and white magazine the same size as *The General*. Issue 1 has 32 pages, issue 2 has 48 and issue 3 (the latest) has 60.

Critical Hit! 3 contains 15 ASL new scenarios, two SASL scenarios and one Platoon Leader Campaign. The scenarios are all presented in the usual ASL format and are quite varied in their scope, with situations ranging from Ethiopia 1936 to Israel 1948 and South Korea 1950, and taking in the East Front, western Europe, the desert and the Pacific along the way. Something for everyone! All scenarios are balanced using the ABS system: there are three handicaps described for each side of increasing severity; whoever chooses the most severe handicap for a side gets that side.

'Arajian Rose' is a Platoon Leader mini campaign. Platoon Leader is a 3rd party add on for mini campaigns using existing maps, although I have not seen a copy yet. It uses a system like *Red Barricades* and *Kampfgruppe Peiper* to run small campaigns up to five or six scenarios in length.

There are also a series of articles reminiscent of those in the Annual, including an interesting history of Chindits and Long Range Penetration Groups in China/Burma/India; an article about playing ASL with a chess clock (?); a detailed scenario replay; quite a cliquey retrospective of ten years of Oktoberfest (an American ASL convention) and a couple of editorial type pieces. In some ways the most useful pieces are a detailed flow chart documenting procedures to use for OBA and a set of supplementary SASL rules for infantry only SASL.

All in all I would recommend *Critical Hit!* to any ASLhead looking for more material. It is available for £7.95 from Esdevium Games, 6 Wellington Street, Aldershot, GU11 1DZ.

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IS THERE ASL LIFE AFTER AVALON HILL?

Andrew Saunders

There seems to be a big "To do" just now regarding Avalon Hill. Some people are panicking about the prospect of them "Going to the wall". Who cares! Not me, that's for sure!! OK. What have they got left to offer us ASL'ers? Let's see...*March To Oblivion*, *KGP II*, and one or two historical modules. With regard to *March To Oblivion*, ask yourself how many scenarios you expect to play pushing some "crappy" Polish tankettes around your mapboard.

What we need to do is look on the positive side of things. This mag for instance, *ASL News*, *Tactiques*, *Time On Target*, *Backblast*, and *Critical Hit*. I believe *Critical Hit* offers a series of campaign games called Platoon Leader. I haven't seen it yet but I'm led to believe it's very good.

Basically, my point is this. Avalon Hill is NOT ASL. ASL players are the game. It will never fade away if Avalon Hill disappear because ASL players are just too committed to the game.

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Editor's Note: Since this was written, Bob McNamara, ASL Q&A man extra-ordinaire, has left Avalon Hill. They have also turned down a £200,000 offer by noted US baseball player and ASL player Curt Schilling to buy the rights to ASL. According to a message posted by Schilling on the InterNet, they would not part with ASL for less than \$500,000, so, if anyone wins the lottery, and is interested....

NON - COM - MUNICATION

Non-com: a non-commissioned officer (EG a Squad Leader).
Communication: to talk, exchange ideas and information.

STEVE COCKS, HEREFORD

If there are any ASL players in my area, feel free to get in touch. My address is 3 Tavistock Drive, Hereford, HR2 7XN (CIS 100112,2276). I apologise in advance for any delay in replying as I am often in Sweden on business.

TREVOR EDWARDS, PRESTON

I received *View From The Trenches*. Very good! I have *SASL* but I may not play it for a long while for the reasons you mentioned (because of FTF and PBEM opponents being readily available). The picture on the front is the only let down I'm afraid. Strange how the picture of the two Americans and their LMG came out so well.

The reason for the difference is that the cover picture is a scanned photograph, and the other is a scanned black and white drawing. It also doesn't help that VFTT is only printed on a dot matrix printer. One of these days I'm gonna try and find some time so I can clarify the cover picture, as a number of people has commented on it's poor quality (or buy a laser printer).

IAN DAGLISH, CHESHIRE

Thanks for yet another *View from The Trenches*.

I feel you should definitely aim to assemble and publish a list of UK ASL players' names and addresses. Ideally, phone numbers too. The listings of "Non Coms of Company A" in the annual has been invaluable in looking up potential opponents when visiting the USA.

Some ideas for *VFTT*. For those of us who do not yet have access to the Internet, how about a review of some of the more interesting news and views being posted? From what I have seen, there are a few pearls among a heap of dross, so editing down should not be a problem!

As I mentioned in the editorial, I am considering this as far as the scenarios are concerned. Any news will probably be out of date though by the time VFTT gets printed.

Linked to this, how about a rules Q&A section. I would be happy to receive any queries that are puzzling ASL players, and if necessary seek 'expert' guidance.

As I mentioned in my editorial, I am willing to post questions on the InterNet for a response as well. If any readers post questions directly to you, let me know so I can reprint them in future issues.

Finally, a request. My long-planned ASL historical module covering the 82nd 'All American' in Normandy is taking shape, with maps complete and scenarios ready for playtesting. If anyone has access to any info on the 82nd and its actions in June '44, especially to do with the US glider troops of the 325 Regiment and the German troops defending the area west of St Mare Eglise, I'd be grateful for references. Send them to me at 5 Swiss Hill Mews, Alderley Edge, Cheshire, SK9 7DP.

ROBERT HARTWELL, SURREY

Thanks for sending me a copy of the third edition of your 'zine. It is good to know that there are some people out there who take an interest. I have been a lone gamer for many years, I was beginning to think I was on my own!

If the 'newsletter can be successful in promoting FTF play and bring together UK ASLers then it will certainly have been a very worthwhile endeavour. The 'zine is interesting and very worthwhile - keep up the good work!

Sounds like a teacher's report remark that does. Actually, VFTT, is trying to promote all types of ASL gaming, not just FTF, as can be seen from the PBM and PBEM articles in this issue.

DOMINIC McGRATH, BERKSHIRE

Thanks for sending me *VFTT*. As you say, it's great to know that at long last the British ASL fraternity is getting itself organised - and special thanks are due to you and Neil Stevens for getting things moving.

Thank you. All it needed was someone

to do something though. Luckily, two of us started doing something at the same time.

I think your approach of keeping people in touch rather than trying to compete with the other fanzines at this stage is spot on - keep up the good work. It's an excellent idea to distribute *VFTT* free at this stage because it ensures that all (known) British ASL players are in touch. You ask if people would mind having their name and address published. I certainly have no objection and would, in fact, welcome it. And my telephone number too. One approach may be to send out a questionnaire with your next issue. This would firstly mean that you could get consent for publication of details but would also mean you could include other details including experience, whether able to host gamers, etc.

I'm already thinking of putting a questionnaire in soon (either issue 6 or 7 probably). For now though I'm waiting to see what sort of response Neil Stevens gets from the mini-questionnaire he included with his Intensive Fire '95 application form.

ANDREW SAUNDERS, BLACKPOOL

Firstly, congrats for your efforts on producing your fanzine. Keep up the good work!!

As a suggestion, why not try and include a scenario in every issue.

I'd love to include a couple every issue, but until people start sending some in, there's not a lot I can do. Although I am looking into the possibility of printing the scenarios that can be found on the InterNet. So all you budding scenario writers out there, let's be hearing from you.

RICHARD CORNWELL, AUSTRALIA

Thank you for sending me a copy of *VFTT*. It is very interesting, and very good to see some UK activity. I always found it hard to find opponents in the UK. I did go to ASLOK in 1993 and did OK though (beat Gary Fortenberry in a preliminary tournament!)

I applaud your initiative and wish you all the best.

Thanks very much. Now that you've moved to Australia, perhaps you can let us

know what the ASL scene is like down under.

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Continued from page 2

the hotshots from "across the pond".

By no means is this an extensive explanation of PBM ASL but a taster to convince you that it does work. I am indebted to the articles published in the AHIKS newsletter *EureDespatch* compiled by Mike Davies and Rhett Richwell. My thanks also go to my regular PBM opponents Rhett Richwell, Paul Rideout, and Jeff Hawarden.

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Continued from page 3

sub asl-l. There is no need to write anything else because the list server computer will interpret it. Be prepared though to empty your mail box regularly or you will be deleted from the list. This is not being anti-social because if you let your mail box fill up the Server will keep trying to send you messages and will itself clog up. Alternatively send **set asl-l digest** and you will receive all the days messages in one large mailing.

If you have any further questions feel free to EMail me on:

100333.3652@compuserve.com.

Happy Surfing!

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FINAL FIRE

That's all for this issue. Hope you enjoyed it. Feel free to write and tell me what you think, or even contribute.

A few copies of issues 3 and 4 are still available upon request.

Issue 6 should be out at the start of January, although this depends on how Christmas goes (glug, glug, glug!).

VIEW FROM THE TRENCHES is a newsletter for the British ASL community. It is available for the price of an SAE. All correspondence should be sent to **VIEW FROM THE TRENCHES**, 49 Lombardy Rise, Leicester, LE5 0FQ or **100665,267@compuserve.com.**